

Letter to the Editor  
*Washington Business Journal, June 1, 2001*

## **WBJ's 'techway' stand a real sales job**

**Blair G. Ewing, President Montgomery County Council**

Your editorial "A Bridge to the Past" [Washington Business Journal, April 6-12] seems based less on the facts and more on a sales job by special interests promoting their view at the expense of neighborhoods in Maryland and Virginia and real solutions to the problems of traffic congestion and sprawl.

The statistic you cite, that 102,000 cars would purportedly use the proposed second Potomac River crossing into Maryland and its associated "truckway" or "techway," is based on preliminary raw data being compiled by Montgomery County's Transportation Policy Review. That 102,000 figure is not so surprising. If you build it, with apologies to Kevin Costner, they will indeed come. The question is whether this will ease traffic congestion.

What the salesmen didn't tell you is that the scenario associated with the 102,000 figure is based on spending \$15 billion for a mega-solution that includes the total wish list for road building. To put that figure in perspective, we now spend about \$1 billion every 20 years.

Also left untold was that the same preliminary projection showed little relief on the American Legion bridge and the Beltway, and more traffic stacking up on I-270 north of the proposed superhighway.

The fact is that there was such a highway on the Virginia and Maryland master plans in the 1960s. Virginia took it out of its master plan first -- and Maryland followed suit. Over the past several decades, thousands of homes have been located in that area on the Maryland side -- many of which would be steam-rolled by the proposed project.

Additionally, Montgomery County has taken the lead in the metropolitan area by assembling our 90,000-acre "crown jewel" agricultural reserve. Many jurisdictions in the region, overwhelmed by sprawl, wish they had done what Montgomery did -- when they still had the chance. The "techway" would slash through this green space and no amount of landscaping and vague and changeable promises of "parkways with no exits" is going to change that reality.

You criticize opponents of this project for "decades-old thinking," but it is truly decades-old attitudes on your part to think that we will pave over existing neighborhoods, parkland and painstakingly preserved green space to build expressways.

Montgomery County's "Commission on the Future," which put economic development at the very center of the county's future agenda, expressed "serious reservations" about a second Potomac crossing. "A second bridge would not only impact the county's land use and open space policies," the report said, "but could also have a negative impact on the county's job growth and economic development initiatives."

And there's more -- the harm this proposal would do to BWI airport, in which Marylanders have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in tax money. And the possibility of sucking economic development out of the core metropolitan area to the outskirts, requiring even more long-distance commuting and making traffic congestion even worse.

Then, is it any wonder that the entire Montgomery County Council -- Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, InterCounty Connector supporters and opponents all oppose a second crossing? So, too, do the County Executive and the state of Maryland. And the more people know about what it would and wouldn't do, the more business people, commuters and neighborhood groups throughout Maryland, in the District and Virginia are coming to the same conclusion.

A recent poll put the question to people straight: "To solve the region's transportation problems, is it more important to build new roads or fund new transit projects?" Montgomery County residents chose transit over roads 52 percent to 32 percent.

That complements a finding from a poll taken by the Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Public Policy, which showed that 70 percent of respondents favored managing new growth so that existing roads and mass transit could meet transportation needs, as opposed to 24 percent who favored building more roads.

Traffic congestion continues to be a major challenge in our region. That's why it's important to focus our efforts on road improvements, mass transit expansions and land-use policies that can make a difference now for commuters and that are consistent with preserving our neighborhoods, our green spaces and the quality of life we all want for our kids and grandkids.

The proposed additional Potomac River bridge and connected "truckway" just doesn't make that cut.